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The Character and formation of intellectuals within the ANC- led South African liberation movement*

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Who are intellectuals in the context of the ANC –led South African liberation struggle?

It is common for scholars to see themselves as representing what is covered by the notion of an intellectual and to restrict the scope of the word to those who hold recognised academic qualifications or write in accredited journals. Intellectual debate about various issues surround what are conventionally called 'scholars' and the 'scholarly community' (Codesria, 2003. See also *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1986, vol 1, 1089 and Bullock and Trombley, 1999, 433).

These are very limited conceptions of what constitutes an intellectual. Instead this paper has in mind a category of individuals who, following Gramsci, should be defined by the role they play, by the relationship they have to others. They are people who, broadly speaking, create for a class or people (in the South African case, the majority who were nationally oppressed under apartheid) a coherent and reasoned account of the world, as it appears from the position they occupy. Intellectuals are crucial to the process through which a major new culture, representing the world-view of an emerging class or people, comes into being. It is intellectuals who transform what may previously have been incoherent and fragmentary 'feelings' of those who live a particular class or nationally

* This paper has been shortened as a reluctant concession to readers who may not read the full version. Those who would like the complete text can e-mail me.

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oppressed position, into a coherent account of the world. (Cf. Gramsci, 1971, 418, Crehan, 2002, 129-130.)

In a letter of 1931 Gramsci says his definition of an intellectual 'is much broader than the usual concept of "the great intellectuals"' (1979,204). In his *Prison Notebooks*, he writes:

What are the 'maximum' limits of acceptance of the term 'intellectual'? Can one find a unitary criterion to characterise equally all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals and to distinguish these at the same time and in an essential way from the activities of other social groupings? *The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations.* (1971,8. Emphasis inserted)

A worker is not characterised by the manual or instrumental work that he or she carries out, but by 'performing this work in specific conditions and in specific social relations.' Under the capitalist mode of production, Gramsci claims, qualifications of an intellectual nature are needed to perform entrepreneurial functions. This is not to say that intellectual qualities determine the entrepreneur's part in society, which is decided 'by the general social relations which specifically characterise the position of the entrepreneur within industry.' (ibid).

If we use such an approach and do not first set formal entry hurdles in the way of classifying people in this category, we need to broaden our investigation and examine the many ways of intellectual functioning as well as processes of intellectual formation that may be found in this continent, now and in the past, which go back to the pre-colonial past, though that is beyond the scope of this paper.¹

¹ It is well known that in every society, strata existed who performed an intellectual role. Certain individuals were charged with various spiritual and ritual duties and other cultural functions that explained the meaning of life, gave explanations for disasters or prognosticated for the future. The accuracy or otherwise of what they did, measured by 'contemporary science' is unimportant. What is significant here is that this constituted an intellectual role, a way of making sense of the world for others, that there were people that performed such a role in all societies. (Cf Mamdani, 1995, for some reference to pre-colonial intelligentsias.)

What is conventionally termed 'praise poetry' may also be classified in this way. Archie Mafeje showed over 30 years ago that the role of bards in African rural communities is not simply to 'praise' but to provide explanations, including criticism and satire. (Mafeje, 1967. See also A.C. Jordan, 1973). More recently, in the South African independent trade union movement, which emerged from the 1970s, this genre has been revived, to convey an anti-capitalist message. (See Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange, 1986).

Another significant feature of the period of colonial conquest, as a more or less universal phenomenon, was the periodic emergence of prophets in various societies on the continent, people offering a millenarian vision as a way of adapting to or avoiding colonial conquest. In the early 19th century Eastern Cape, for example, two prophets, influenced in varying degrees by Christianity, manifested this in a dramatic form with contrasting visions. In the case of Ntsikana his vision was more accommodating of the colonial order, while Makana became a warrior-prophet and after leading an attack on the garrison on Grahamstown, was imprisoned on Robben Island. (Cf A.C. Jordan, 1973, ch 5)

This paper covers a very broad topic. On the level of theory it does not pretend to have exhaustively probed the implications of all the issues that arise, especially in the vast literature emanating from Gramsci nor the writings examining his theories. It is a beginning, towards providing a theoretical basis that is more adequate in explaining the categories of intellectuals found in the dominant section of the South African liberation movement, led by the ANC. At the level of data, a number of important experiences that bear on or have influenced the formation of intellectuals are not dealt with, mainly for reasons of space and time constraints. These include the Communist night schools, underground organisational experience, the open democratic phase of the late 1970s and 1980s, the more recent trade union experiences starting in the early 1970s, the influence of Soviet Party schools and the more recent input of the South African Communist Party into political education and intellectual formation. The choice has primarily been to opt for a chronological account, without assigning degrees of importance to experiences included or excluded.

ANC intellectuals come from a variety of sources

In the context of the ANC-led national liberation movement, the concept intellectual may be said to apply to individuals created through various processes, some inside the ANC and allied organisations, sometimes deriving from outside, through more conventional institutions, like universities. In deploying intellectual skills derived from these conventional institutions, it has not been a case of simply applying that knowledge and training. These professionals have needed to undergo various intellectual transformations within the organisation(s) in order to perform tasks related to national liberation, to give them the skills that are organisationally specific.

The term intellectual may be said to apply to people deriving from all of these processes who perform a specific role, that is, who provide meanings to situations, guidelines for escaping from oppression as well as visions of alternative social conditions, shown to be necessary, possible and potentially realisable. What that means is not determined for all times, but has a variety of meanings, determined by modified conditions and also by changes in the composition of the organisation.

The Liberation movement as 'collective intellectual'

The concept intellectual, following Gramsci, is also applicable to political parties and by analogy to the national liberation movement itself.² Gramsci argues that a political party plays an intellectual role and by that he ascribes various characteristics to the party as organisation, and in its relationship to intellectuals. Gramsci's focus is on the institutions that produce knowledge rather than on individual intellectuals and he sees a party as

² In the context of this paper, I take this even wider and apply it to the alliance of the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP), when that becomes established and to some extent also the trade union ally, at first the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), later replaced by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

being composed of intellectuals or as some writers have summarised him, as itself being a 'collective intellectual' or 'collective organic intellectual'³:

That all members of a political party should be regarded as intellectuals is an affirmation that can easily lend itself to mockery and caricature. But if one thinks about it nothing could be more exact. There are of course distinctions of level to be made. A party might have a greater or lesser proportion of members in the higher grades or in the lower, but this is not the point. What matters is the function, which is directive and organisational, i.e. educative, i.e. intellectual. (Gramsci, 1971,16).

The notion of a 'collective intellectual' is not analogous to 'one individual writ large', but comprises a multiplicity of individuals, unity and cohesion amongst whom is by no means automatic.

The intellectual role of the party or liberation movement, as with intellectual functioning generally, is related to organisational tasks, qualities that are necessary in order to perform specific functions. What this means is that those who already have qualities apply them in a particular way, or those without those qualities may develop them through various processes within the organisation. These qualities are directed towards achieving goals, and many of these Gramsci sees as inherent in a political party aiming to establish its hegemony. They have an intellectual character. By definition, these objectives cannot be achieved without an educational dimension.

The ANC-led liberation movement has played an intellectual role insofar as it welds together a variety of intellectuals in forming a common will, contributing towards the voicing of a new national popular will. (Cf Gramsci, 1971, 15-16). This is not a simple process but a product of struggle and contestation over meanings as well as creation of and transformation in the character of various categories of intellectuals. Its meaning was different in 1912 from what it was to be in the 1950s, 1960s and today. Who contributes towards that role and with what weight varies in different periods and conditions, including the influence carried by contributions from outside the organisation or in more recent times from allied organisations that may have overlapping membership⁴.

But the political party or in this case national liberation movement, as collective intellectual, is also manifested in some of the products of its activities. Insofar as a consensus amongst its components results in interpretative documentation and media of various sorts, which are presented to its membership and the public at large, that is an intellectual function. It may be empowering insofar as it renders visible what was opaque. It may provide explanations for what is difficult to understand or what is intended by the oppressors/exploiters to be understood in a way that is disadvantageous to the oppressed and exploited people.

³ The term 'collective intellectual' or 'collective organic intellectual' may not have been used by Gramsci himself. The term 'collective intellectual' may first have been deployed by Togliatti (1979, e.g. at 155) and subsequently amongst others by Lawner, introduction to Gramsci (1979, at 44, 52,), Boggs, 1976, ch 5. Crehan speaks of 'collective organic intellectual' (2002, 150).

⁴ For some time members of the SACP have been able to simultaneously hold membership of the ANC, as has also been the case with SACTU and now COSATU.

At various stages of the South African struggle, starting in the pre-conquest period a variety of forms of resistance were employed. These were based on analyses and estimations of what was at stake, what the threat of colonial rule or the fact of conquest meant, whatever the colonialists may have used to disguise it. These organic intellectuals of the liberation movement have in the first place sought to provide explanations of colonial/apartheid conquest and repression, to unmask it where it was disguised and to explain causality where that too was not evident. Some of these explanations have been very elaborate, relating as they have to fundamentally changed conditions.

Intellectual work has often provided hope of something different where everything was done to suggest that what existed was unalterable. (Cf Seme, 1972 [1911], Pallo Jordan, 1988). This was especially significant in periods of defeat, as was the case at the time of the Act of Union and more recently when the major leadership figures were sentenced in the Rivonia trial in 1964⁵. Anyone reading the ANC strategy and tactics document of 1969 will be struck by the attempt to contest this notion of unchallengeability of apartheid oppression and point to the vulnerability of the regime. (See below and ANC, 1969.).

The ANC-led National Liberation movement as creator of intellectuals

Furthermore, a key element of the national liberation movement functioning as 'collective intellectual' is its role in creating its own intellectuals through various processes. This is not to suggest, as Gramsci indicates, that all such intellectuals were of the same level and calibre. Some were simply inducted into the ANC or an allied organisation and became communicators of a vision and organisers in a more limited way. Others became major thinkers, after passing through the institutional structures of the ANC and/or allied organisations.

The job of intellectuals has been to try to contribute through theory to finding a way out, a way of escape from the dehumanisation of apartheid colonialism. The answer to that question has varied, as will be shown later in this paper. But all the enquiries, which may be described as activities of organic intellectuals, have related to the question of how to resolve the status of the oppressed people in South Africa.

It is true, that some answers may have related to the class basis of the intellectuals who provided them, setting limits on what they advanced as 'the possible or feasible or realistic' (without necessarily using such words). It is not therefore only the situation of conquest, but also the historical development and composition and social basis of the liberation movement that has conditioned the role intellectuals have played at different times. And of course those are mediating factors that continue at this very moment. Some conditions led to a radical and socialist intellectual intervention as part of the collective intellectual input of the alliance as a whole in previous periods. These may be under threat, under new conditions, which include the formation of an ANC- led government and the possible creation of a new ruling bloc, where the weight of the

⁵ 'Rivonia' refers to the place where they were arrested, although Nelson Mandela, accused number one, was already in prison at the time.

working class is counter-balanced by a perceived demand of a globalised world for economic 'fundamentals' to be respected, simultaneously with the increasing strength of an emerging black bourgeoisie.

In focusing on the ANC and its allies I am not suggesting that they are the only movements that have performed a substantial intellectual role nor had an important intellectual component within their functioning. In fact, the Trotskyist, Unity Movement of South Africa gave primacy to educational tasks, though it may be that this was mainly in relation to people passing through formal educational institutions or in debates amongst an intelligentsia.⁶ I am however aware that many of these Unity Movement scholars made an insufficiently acknowledged intellectual contribution, rewriting history from the point of view of the oppressed people and the working class in particular. (E.g. Majeke, 1986, Mnguni, 1988).

Intellectual role and processes of intellectual formation

Early ANC

In the years prior to the Act of Union, the small stratum of British and American-trained African intellectuals together with mission-trained individuals and a limited number of self-trained intellectuals were very active in the emerging African press, the church and the small number of associations that were the forerunners of the ANC. (A.C. Jordan, 1973, Odendaal, 1984)

In a sense, these professionals were part of the transition and the interpretation of the transition from one form of struggle to another, from the 'spear to the book'. (Kunene, 1968). In the type of politics inaugurated by the Act of Union it was clear that, for the moment, military resistance was over. Opportunities to participate in parliamentary politics had been open in a marginal sense mainly in the Cape, from the mid 19th century and this was one of the key areas of intervention of intellectuals and much of the press interventions of this period related to African voting, especially in the few constituencies where African voters formed a sizeable number. (A.C. Jordan, 1973, Odendaal, 1984).

With the Act of Union, it was a wider form of involvement that arose, requiring a conceptualisation of a new form of interaction with the white authorities. The ANC was first formed as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in Bloemfontein on January 8 1912. Its initial structure combined elements of continuity as well as rupture with what had preceded it. It included a House of Chiefs, modelled on the House of Lords, recognising the continuing authority of traditional leaders who had led the tribal resistance against Boer and British conquest in the 19th century. But its founders were faced with a completely new situation. Britain had handed the fate of black South Africans to the local white settlers through the formation of the Union.

⁶ The Trotskyist left did also for a period of time implement training programmes in a night school. Cf Bird (1980, 68-69)

The earliest attempts at characterising the meaning of Union and the alternative notion embraced in the establishment of the ANC were ambiguous but also had potentially revolutionary implications. Pixley ka Isaka Seme, in advancing the notion of a 'native union' articulated what may have been the germs of a new nation. Writing in 1911, on the eve of the establishment of the ANC, Seme said he wanted to write on the 'simple subject of Native Union, for after all, this is what the Congress shall be.' (1972,72).

This message was immensely progressive, advancing as it did a fundamental alternative to the Union's attempt to create a nation in South Africa that excluded the African people. This alternative aimed to overcome the animosities between different peoples, which had been exploited in the process of conquest, and also to build a unity between African people that could be the foundation for this new nation.

But in the context of the times the concept had its own limitations. It was a union of Africans only. It was a concept of the nation that implicitly excluded women, since they were not yet members of the ANC.

It was also a concept of unity, which may not only have excluded the use of difference to create divisions, but also denied the validity of distinct identities within this unity. In other words, within the overall progressive and even revolutionary character of this early response to conquest there were also the germs of a long-term danger. This lay in the characteristic projection of a national liberation movement as representing the nation as a whole, declaring that the people 'are one' and by implication seeing alternative conceptions of identity as divisive of that unity.

But the immediate problem confronting the fledgling organisation was to negotiate a way of operating in new conditions. For decades after the Act of Union, appeals to the authorities via deputations and petitions dominated the organisation's methods. In order to conduct this type of strategy, a different type of leadership was required. Thus, the first executive was composed entirely of mission-trained professionals –lawyers, priests, teachers and self-taught intellectual and writer Sol Plaatje.

While the modes of struggle opened up after 1910 required new skills and practices, they established patterns of behaviour, which marked organisational conceptions of itself, its relationship to the government as well as its own members.

Daniel Kunene articulated the challenges of the time:

The African had just emerged from a prolonged battle which he had lost. While this battle raged, he had composed heroic lines for the warriors and kings upon whom he placed his trust... This came to pass- the country perished. But the struggle was not over, it had only shifted from physical to intellectual plane. Education was the new weapon, the intellectual the new warrior. A correspondent of the *Isigidimi*...commenting on the African's suffering under the white man's rule, suggested that 'the spear' was not the solution. 'No', he said, 'we have tried and failed. The only solution is learning and knowledge. By knowledge I do not mean just book knowledge. I mean that kind of knowledge that will make us realise that each one lives for all.' (Kunene, 1968, 23-24)

In becoming a new leadership, the ANC simultaneously started to weld together an organisation that performed the intellectual role that Gramsci attributes to a political party. This was to be a rough road with the present outcome, of the ANC as leading force in government, by no means preordained and at times seeming totally unlikely. There were periods where the organisation was close to nonexistent. (Dubow, 2000, xiv)

The new leadership tried to give meaning to the conditions that Africans encountered, not only Union but also new pieces of discriminatory legislation. Simultaneously, some individuals performed individual intellectual roles, organic to the liberation movement. What these intellectuals did was give meaning reflectively, actively and consequentially. Thus, Sol Plaatje famously documented the impact of the Land Act of 1913, and used his writings and research to campaign in Britain. (Plaatje, 1982 [1916]).

Essential to the period of petitioning and deputations that opened up after the founding of the ANC was a quest for inclusion within the civil rights constitutionally guaranteed to whites. In order to qualify for inclusion leaders of the time professed loyalty to the British crown and the Union constitution. This was something commonly found in liberation movements of the time. (Cf e.g. Kiernan, 1993, 89, Younis, 2000, Apter, 1964)

The early characterisation of the South African state, and social order and the strategic perspective of the ANC were articulated mainly by the small group of African intellectuals. Many commentators dwell on the photographs of this early leadership, in very formal dress supposedly as a marked contrast to the rise of later more 'angry' generations⁷. There is also a tendency to ridicule their petitioning of local and British authorities as conservative or 'fawning' (Motlhabi, 1984, 38) or as going 'cap in hand' to their masters. Leaders of this period are often criticised for naivety in their appeals to British morality and Christianity, the values with which most of them had grown up.

It would be a mistake to read too much into this approach. (Marks and Trapido, 1987, 6.) Peter Limb has shown that a careful reading of the texts demonstrates that many of these interventions were heavily laden with irony. The idioms and values of the Empire were used partly with subversive intent. Also, there was an attempt in these appeals to pit the former colonial power against the main enemy, the white settlers, (Limb, 2003. See also Saunders, 2000). In a sense they may have tried to practise 'divide and rule' in reverse.

Official politics and parallel politics of a less formal kind

Even where one speaks of ANC politics of a particular time being dominated by particular practices, there has always been contestation, difference over direction, different meanings given to oppression and the nation and ways of contesting apartheid colonial structures.

⁷ Cf Dubow, 2000, 4. The dress and class composition of the 'angry' generation of the Youth League was in the main very similar to that of the founders of the ANC.

At the same time as the 'elite' leadership of the ANC pursued one type of politics there were simultaneously various manifestations of more radical ideas and organisation, within the ANC itself in the Transvaal (cf Bonner, 1982), amongst the women (Wells, 1993, Ginwala, 1990), in the union movement, especially in the early years of the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) (Cf Bradford, 1987) and in the activities of the Communist Party. (Cf e.g. Simons and Simons, 1969).

Thus, while men were engaged in moderately building a counter-union, they did not at first include women as members of the ANC and, by implication, the future nation was masculine.⁸ It was only in 1943 that women achieved the right to full membership. Excluded from the organisation, women were not under the same constraints of 'deputation politics'. From an early period, they were freed for what was often a more radical, mass politics where demands were made rather than petitioning the authorities. In Bloemfontein protesting against the extension of passes in 1913, women marched under the radical banner, declaring 'We have done with pleading. We now demand!' (Wells, 1993)

In the early ANC we have seen, using the theoretical categories earlier outlined, that intellectuals contributed towards an embryonic sense of nationhood. Their strategies for achieving this were at first hesitant and constitutional, though there were also counter-strategies articulated by the women and other organisational formations. At this point in time, the ANC as an organisation was not yet playing a well defined role as 'collective intellectual', though the various intellectuals associated with the organisation articulated a broadly shared vision on which the organisation acted, subject to the contestation that has been mentioned.

Political education in the 1950s⁹

Following the establishment of the ANC Youth League in the 1940s and the adoption of its programme by the ANC as a whole, Walter Sisulu was elected Secretary-General and the new and younger leadership wanted to embark on a more militant course.

One lesson of ANC history is that the leadership from the 1950s was never able to simply embark on any course of action purely because they considered it wise and desirable. The organisation was developing a mass following and the consciousness of its members, what it was willing to do, could not be ignored. Mandela explains how important the earlier Indian passive resistance campaign was in influencing the ANC to adopt its Defiance campaign of 1952. Until then, Africans had considered imprisonment as imposing a stigma and it was only gradually that they could be persuaded to move towards breaking the law and incurring imprisonment. (Mandela, 1994). The meaning

⁸ Natasha Erlank argues that this was a continuous trend (Erlank, unpub, 2001).

⁹ In the period up to the 1950s, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) initiated a number of night schools. While these were primarily literacy classes, they also communicated principles of Marxism. Many leading ANC and CPSA/SACP figures passed through these schools. This is dealt with in the longer version of this paper.

of imprisonment had to be redefined and rethought in popular consciousness, as being an honour in certain contexts.

Furthermore, there is an additional careful choice of words. 'Defiance' was consciously adopted instead of 'passive resistance' the word used in the Indian Congress campaign. Sisulu indicated, this was a specific intervention aimed at driving the struggle towards a higher plane, and indeed the notion of confrontation conveyed by the words 'defy' was new to the vocabulary of South African politics. (Sisulu, 2001, 76)

The Defiance campaign was conceived as a break with the past, even part of a revolutionary break.

It had the effect of making the people confident and fearless, prepared to defy the laws, to be prepared to go to jail and meet any situation.... It was the beginning of a new situation which led even to a person facing the death penalty with confidence. The Campaign brought about a situation in which people were not arrested just by chance, but by plan... . In the Eastern Cape, it was called 'Amadela Kufa', 'defiers of death'. You can see from this that a revolutionary situation was emerging. (Sisulu, 2001,79).

During the 1950s the ANC anticipated the possibility of banning after action against the Communist Party, which dissolved in 1950 and later reconstituted underground. (Suttner 2004). The ANC developed the M-Plan, to undertake street level organisation, as a preparation for future banning and underground operation. One of the elements of this plan was extensive political education. (Anon, 1984, Interviews Mtshali, Nair, 2003, Lambert, unpub 1988, Everatt, unpub 1990. Mandela, 1994, 135, Suttner, 2003a).

Very many people appear to have gone through some form of internal education during the 1950s, where a common understanding of 'Congress politics' was developed, through lectures and discussion. Those who participated at one level were expected to give the lectures at another. Mandela speaks of it as 'an elementary course of political lectures for its members throughout the country. These lectures were meant not only to educate but to hold the organisation together. They were given in secret by branch leaders....' (1994, 135.)

Inside and outside these structures and within this overall perspective, many cadres saw political education as their key task during this period. Elias Motsoaledi recalls:

We took those who understood into a house and continued with political classes in order to give the movement its impetus; you must have real members not only paper members. People did not know the history of the ANC so we had to impart this knowledge to them. Secondly, *they needed to know the day-to-day issues which affected them; to make him understand exactly why he was treated the way he was treated.* I had so many people from all over Soweto who came to me for political classes. . . You were able to articulate all their problems. Then they started to respect you. (Quoted Bonner and Segal, 1998, 50. Emphasis inserted. One of those who attended such courses was MR Takalo, interview, 2004).

One significant aspect of the political education is that much of its content seemed to have been informed by a Marxist orientation. (Anon, 1984, Interviews, Nair, Cleopas Ndlovu, 2003. See Suttner, 2003a). Generally, the widespread diffusion of Marxist thinking within the ANC today, tends to be attributed to the exile experience, where some cadres were sent to Communist Party schools and much of the political education had a Marxist orientation. (Cf Interview Nat Serache, 2002. See Sparg, Schreiner and Ansell, 2001, Suttner, 2003). But clearly these Congress Alliance courses indicate that the modes of analysis were already within that paradigm long before the period of exile.

During this period and even earlier a great deal of political education was conducted in some ANC and Communist-aligned trade unions. (Suttner, 2003a). If one examines the 1940s and 1950s in the province of Natal, now called KwaZulu Natal, with the embryonic establishment of nonracial trade unions, an elaborate system of internal education was in place, conducted in the main by Communists. Through these courses, sometimes called 'social theory', sometimes Marxism, many people received training in a Marxist analysis of social relations.

In one set of interviews Eric Mtshali, a veteran MK member and now a member of the SACP¹⁰ Central Committee, went through such training. (Interview, Mtshali, 2003). In an interview with Cleopas Ndlovu one hears that he went through a similar course at a later stage. When he was moved from the general class to a more advanced course with smaller numbers, his lecturer was Eric Mtshali. (Interview Cleopas Ndlovu, 2003). What this means is that through the process of internal education within the unions and the Communist Party of which Mtshali was then a member, Mtshali was transformed from a student into a lecturer and in Gramscian terms, into a person performing an intellectual role.¹¹

The internal education conducted within the Congress Alliance during the 1950s helped consolidate a common perspective on what constituted apartheid oppression and exploitation as well as the type of society that should be developed to replace it. In this regard, the development of the Freedom Charter was an important product of the alliance as 'collective intellectual' presenting a vision and opening up debate on what that alternative should be. (Cf Suttner and Cronin, 1986).

All of this was subject to contestation. This was dramatically illustrated by the breakaway of the Africanists, objecting to clauses of the Charter referring to South Africa belonging to both black and white and possible nationalisation of certain means of production. During this period, there was also considerable intellectual debate regarding strategies, tactics as well as how to characterise the South African social formation. (Cf Everatt, unpub 1990). Thus, while there was a collective expression of Congress policy that resulted from debates involving diverse views, some of these were obviously less

¹⁰ When the Communist Party was reconstituted underground in 1953, it was renamed as the South African Communist Party (SACP). (Cf Suttner, 2004). *MK* refers to *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the Spear of the Nation), the ANC's armed wing.

¹¹ At a later stage, with the re-emergence of the independent worker movement in the early 1970s large-scale attention was paid to worker education through a variety of courses and media in the years that followed. (Cooper et al, 2002).

represented in the resulting consensus than others. This remained the basis for later debate, contestation and sometimes withdrawal from the organisation.

What we see in this period is organic intellectuals operating in the service of the liberation movement, involved in drafting documents as well as debating policy. At the same time a common conception was developed amongst membership through internal education and debate. This internal cohesion was manifested in unity behind a common programme, the Freedom Charter

In the same period, the SACP was reconstituted underground and that was also a significant 'collective intellectual' contribution within its own ranks and through individual members involved in the alliance as a whole. (Cf Suttner, 2004).

Political training in exile and especially in the military camps

During the 1950s there was increasing discussion about 'fighting back', the need to respond to the violence of the regime with armed force. After the banning of the ANC in 1960, this took concrete shape with the formation of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, initially independent of the ANC.

With the defeat of early sabotage, activities shifted mainly towards more formalised military training outside the country, and gradually also towards the initiation of guerrilla warfare.

Throughout the ANC's exile period, despite the increased emphasis on liberation through warfare, political education was taken very seriously. That is not to say it was uniform and all carefully planned. In fact, much of the exile period was unplanned. The first group of exiles had in the main expected to return to the country as trained soldiers within six months. (Cf e.g. Mtshali interview, 2003). Many were in fact unable to return for almost 30 years. The initial level of political education was much extended over the years. (Cf Sparg et al, 2001).

Even where soldiers were expected to be returned quickly, the emphasis had always been that the political should dominate the military and that what mattered was not holding a gun but who was behind the gun, what understanding that person had.

The ANC's army was not meant to be soldiers in a conventional sense, but bearers of a message, ambassadors for a particular vision of society. This is a constant pattern in initial contacts between youth who left the country after 1976, wanting to pick up the gun, and the ANC leadership and cadres whom they met. (Cf Interview, Phumla Tshabalala, 2003. See also Thomas Nkobi, in Bernstein, 1994, 17-18)

The tendency seems generally to have been to restrain tendencies towards militarism and emphasise understanding the struggle and its goals. A body of scholarship, argues that, in practice, militarism was dominant or at least that there was not adequate political control and direction of military activity and there was not even an adequate connection

between the two. (Barrell, unpub, 1993). It is beyond the scope of this contribution to evaluate that. All that is intended here is to stress that political education was considered important because of the professed aim, to emphasise the political character of the struggle, which may or may not have been realised or fully realised in practice.

Cadres needed to understand exactly what they were doing and, in selecting targets, to be able to understand what was especially political significant and which attacks would have particular symbolic importance, because of the specific ways in which apartheid oppression impacted on the people. It was intended that such action should be seen as piercing the apparent invincibility of the enemy. Thus, Petros 'Shoes' Mashigo explains that his MK unit attacked the Soekmeaar police station, due to its association with forced removals. (Interview, 2003)

Just as it was not planned that the initial group of MK volunteers should have remained outside the country for so long, equally, the influx of thousands of new recruits after the 1976 rising was unplanned. While underground operatives within the country reported in general terms of a restive atmosphere, and embryonic signs of resistance, the scale and intensity of the rising was unexpected.

The need for political education of the new recruits was urgent. Many were relatively ignorant of the struggle and its objectives and had a militaristic inclination. Hilda Bernstein may exaggerate the extent to which historical memory of previous struggle was absent from their consciousness (cf Suttner, unpub 2003, though many interviewees do confirm this absence of historical consciousness. Cf Thandi Modise in Curnow, 2000). Bernstein does capture some of the problems that had to be dealt with through political training:

Those of the seventies, and specifically of the huge exile wave after 1976, were overwhelmingly young, largely male; and though fired with political passion, they were often without real ideology or political programmes. They were of a generation who had been cut off from access to information about their own country, their own history, and from political theory and the history of struggle. The 'elders' who might have passed on this knowledge were either themselves in exile, or on Robben Island or Pretoria Central prison. Or perhaps keeping discreetly quiet. 'Mandela' was a remote name, used by some parents as a warning of what happens to those who follow the path of resistance to law and authority.¹² The 1976 Soweto rebels came out with no history in their heads. They believed themselves to be the first revolutionaries, the first to confront the apartheid state; and their anger was often without political objective. They learned the history of their country only when they had left it—the long story of struggle, oppression and resistance. (At xvii)

The young people who erupted from the township schools in 1976 went out fired by anger, seeking revenge, their intention to get a gun and to shoot those who had been shooting them. Once outside they became subject to a very positive political education. They were given books to read—books prohibited in South Africa. They were told the history of their own immediate past. The continuity of their lives had been fractured under apartheid, the history of their parents' lives obliterated. If memory is the continuity principle for people, then history is the continuity principle for nations. By erasing essential areas of history the development of a nation is halted, distorted. Memory and history must merge and reinforce each other so that humans can recognise and understand their lives. 'The

¹² Ralph Mngijima indicates, however, that this negative exhortation was one of the ways that he was made aware of ANC in the face of a public silence about its existence. (Interview, 2003).

Movement'-that vaguely defined but concretely existing body- gave back to these young people their own history, and with it an understanding of the nature of society. ... (Bernstein, 1994, xviii).

Every cadre was meant to be equipped with a broad understanding of the character of the struggle, and its history. They were connected to the strands of resistance that the regime had tried to obliterate from public consciousness.

But the process of training, as it evolved, was also intended and did produce trainers and also new intellectuals. One of the most famous teachers in the camps was Professor Jack Simons, a former leading scholar¹³ who provided general tuition and courses, but also trained a body of more advanced cadres who were to be able to perform Simons's function. (Cf Sparg et al, 2001). Passing through this process were some of the most famous intellectuals in the struggle, amongst them, Cde Mzala, the pseudonym for the late Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo. He was the author of a classic book on Gatsha Buthelezi and very many articles, (cf Mzala, 1988).

Political Education on Robben Island

The prison experience has had a very definite impact on the nature and fortunes of the ANC. Training on Robben Island served to cement a particular conception of history and understanding of the character of the organisation. Although prisoners were held in a variety of different prisons, it is the impact of Robben Island that undoubtedly had a decisive influence on the political development of large numbers of people inside the prison, and after release, on those with whom former prisoners interacted. Although there was political education in most prisons, the Robben Island experience was by far the most important in terms of its long-term impact. Purely for quantitative reasons we are dealing with quite different phenomena. Numbers are important in prison, even for practical matters like facilitating smuggling of political material and other activities relevant to political education. They needed to transcribe and hide documents used for political education and the more prisoners, the easier it was to develop a body of resources for the courses conducted.¹⁴

A large number of young people received much of their political education about the ANC on Robben Island. (Sisulu, 2001, 162, Joseph Faniso Mati in Coetzee et al, 2002, 49-50) Some people first learnt to read and write on the island or acquired advanced education and became seasoned political thinkers or analysts there.

One of the key teachers on the Island was the late Walter Sisulu, who at the time of his imprisonment had not progressed beyond primary education at school. Nelson Mandela

¹³ Simons was a leading scholar in African customary law and a major contributor to political theory in South Africa for some years. His later work included *Class and Colour*, written together with his wife, Ray Alexander (1969).

¹⁴ Transcription was important because books obtained from libraries were sometimes very important to the prisoners but had to be returned. There was no guarantee that these would be allowed into the prison again, where for some reason they had passed the censor unwittingly. In those cases, the book would either be hidden somewhere in the prison or more likely transcribed completely. Consequently over time a body of 'classic' revolutionary texts became part of the 'holdings' in some prisons.

at one point, referred to him as the greatest living historian of the ANC and in this regard Mandela can be taken to refer primarily to oral communication (though Sisulu was also an occasional writer). The notion of an 'oral intellectual' may be a very underrated phenomenon in South Africa. Some of the most important political leaders, like Elias Motsoaledi, had very little formal education and conducted their teachings mainly orally and this was the case with Sisulu. While the need to acquire literacy was stressed, the notion of being a thinker and an intellectual could definitely not be equated with literacy. That is clearly not a lesson of South African history alone, but one derived from all peoples, including the famous Greek philosophers and poets, many of whom were not literate.

Walter Sisulu explains his role:

When we settled down in Robben Island... one of my tasks was to educate people about the history of the ANC and that is what I did.

We were working at the quarry. Now we worked there as groups. So those of us who were taking particular classes would group together, work together. Then a lecture takes place there while we are working. (Sisulu, 2001, 162-3.)

Some of the ideas of the leadership were reduced to writing. This was all strictly illegal and carried out in secret. (Cf Harry Gwala, quoted by Buntman, 1996, at 106)

The Island was decisive in the political education of the young generation of 1976, consolidating their understanding of the history of resistance and in many or most cases, 'converting' them to ANC. (Cf Buntman, 2003). Daniel Montsisi, a leader of the 1976 rising in Soweto records:

The Island was a political education for me. ...It was like putting together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which had been missing all along. We delved into our history. We discovered that we young people were not the first to take up the fight against apartheid, but a new part of a developing process. (Johnson, 1988, 107)

In order to ensure maximum benefit of political education, it was necessary to tackle illiteracy. According to Harry Gwala, one of the most famous educators on the Island, literacy was needed in order to conduct the political theory classes that he and Stephen Dlamini started on the Island¹⁵. Gwala argued that people who were illiterate could not understand the abstract concepts they were teaching and using. (Buntman, 1996, 112-113).

The programmes of political education on the Island were not conceived purely to keep prisoners occupied and avoid idleness, though that may have been a factor, since idleness could lead to demoralisation. There was, additionally, a very self-conscious motivation, to prepare prisoners to play a significant political role after release. Fran Buntman writes:

¹⁵ Dlamini was also crucial in developing the union education courses in Natal, referred to earlier.

[T]he inmates on Robben Island had always regarded it as their duty to produce capable activists who would eventually go back into their communities. The youth of '76 represented the future of the movements and the liberation struggle. These were the future activists, leaders, and soldiers, and so their recruitment was a necessity. Recruitment was, of course, a starting point for the critical process of training activists, teaching them organisational histories, ideologies and strategies, and preparing them for their political obligations and mandates upon release... (Buntman, 2001,156. See also at 168, 170)

Time spent on the Island appeared to have been a way of crystallising thinking and developing common positions on various issues. The Island graduates entry into United Democratic Front (UDF)¹⁶ organisations in the 1980s usually connoted arrival of people who were seen as having much political maturity, and able to advance non-sectarian and unifying positions. This may not always have been the case, and some of these individuals were in the centre of division. But the overall experience brought by many who became active in the UDF appears to have been valued. (Cf Mufson, 1990)

We have referred to the arrest of the ANC leadership at Rivonia in 1964, leading to a rupture in the tradition of Congress organisation and consciousness of what it represented. While it did continue to have an underground presence, many people grew up without systematic exposure to the ideas, principles and ways of organisation of the ANC and its allies. Those released from prison became bearers of a tradition of struggle in the same way as older comrades in exile, helped connect a new generation to the history and policies of the past. (Cf Buntman, 2003).

Pravin Gordhan speaks of the impact of released political prisoners on the thinking and culture of young activists in mid-1970s Natal:

They were bearers of history, bearers of experiences, bearers of anecdotes, bearers of the Congress culture, 'this is how you do things, this is how you say things, this is how you analyse things', they were bearers of inspiration, because you could relate to them as heroes, and there were not many heroes at the time, and each of them had a different quality because they each played a different role.... (Interview, 2003)

Certainly there was an element of romanticism attached to being in prison. It carried considerable authority, feeding into the hierarchical character of the ANC and especially underground. There was often an assumption that activists in the 1980s could not rely on their own judgment, but needed to buttress this with appeal to a higher authority. The ANC official leadership in exile was not easily accessible (although many people listened illegally to the ANC's Radio Freedom, broadcast from Lusaka and other countries on the continent). The next best may have been to consult with a prison veteran. In that sense, their role would have been less intellectual in the sense defined in this paper and more the communication of ideas through effecting a line of command, an essentially hierarchical concept of knowledge. The extent to which this was more broadly present in the communication and adoption of ideas in the ANC needs further research.

¹⁶ The United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983, drawing under one banner, some 600 affiliated organisations, representing over two million members. Although legally prevented from open identification with the ANC, the UDF affiliates tended to view themselves as carrying out the strategies and tactics of the ANC. (See Suttner, unpub 2003a)

Each generation that came together on Robben Island possessed distinct knowledge and experience drawn from the different modes and periods of involvement. The time spent on the Island helped bridge inter-generational gaps, in a way that would impact on the struggle outside:

The Islanders' resistance also fulfilled another function, of facilitating cross-generational communication between different age-sets of activists who were thrown into prison. At times relationships could be tense, especially in the post-1976 period, but generally the prisoners worked to understand each other and build their organisations from the perspective of different generations. This meant, *inter alia*, that *former prisoners leaving the Island to resume activism would carry with them the knowledge and insights of multiple periods of struggle, as well as the ideology and histories of the outlawed organisations.* (Buntman, 1996, at 135. Emphasis inserted).

This is not to suggest that those from any one generation had uncontested versions of what the ANC represented. There were divergent perceptions amongst the leadership, with Govan Mbeki and Harry Gwala challenging the ideas and leadership of Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. (Cf Buntman, 1996, 125). Amongst the 1976 generation, political positions were often less crystallised and the years of contact with the older prisoners saw many 'cross over' to the ANC, but a core remained in the BCM (Black Consciousness Movement).

One of the important features of intellectual evolution of individuals within prisons was the combination of individual and collective work. Many did formal courses, but the main process of development was collective. Political education courses have been emphasised here but the collective influence was wider. In prison one did not read a newspaper alone but in dialogue with others.¹⁷ Sometimes it was a formal session, often called 'news analysis', found also in military situations. (Cf Interview, Victor Moche, 2002). It is in interpreting such data that many people had the opportunity to grow. In fact in these interactions one often finds wholly new ways of interpreting events.

Party/National liberation movement as 'collective intellectual'

The concepts 'collective intellectual' or 'collective organic intellectual' in referring to a political party, we have noted, are ascribed to Gramsci, though he does not appear to have actually used these specific terms. Gramsci speaks of the party playing a coordinating role in regard to intellectuals:

¹⁷ Initially political prisoners were denied legal access to newspapers. Prisoners on Robben Island were fairly successful in smuggling these. In the 1970s the white political prisoners in Pretoria brought an unsuccessful court action to secure access to newspapers, but after losing the case repeatedly right up to the Appellate Division, all political prisoners gradually 'won the war'. Access to more and more news was allowed, culminating in access to all newspapers. But when the present writer was held on a second occasion, under the state of emergency from 1986 to 1988, newspapers were again banned, though being located in a prison where there were ordinary criminals, made smuggling fairly easy. (Cf Suttner, 2001).

The political party, for all groups is precisely the mechanism which carries out in civil society the same function as the state carries out, more synthetically and over a larger scale, in political society. In other words it is responsible for welding together the organic intellectuals of a given group-the dominant one-and the traditional intellectuals. The party carries out this function in strict dependence on its basic function, which is that of elaborating its own component parts-those elements of a social group which has been born and developed as an `economic group'- and of turning them into qualified political intellectuals, leaders and organisers of all the activities and functions inherent in the organic development of an integral society+++, both civil and political. Indeed it can be said that within its field the political party accomplishes its function more completely and organically than the state does within its admittedly far larger field. An intellectual who joins the political party of a particular social group is merged with the organic intellectuals of the group itself, and is linked tightly with the group. This takes place through participation in the life of the state only to a limited degree and often not at all.... (1971, 15-16)

Throughout the history of the liberation movement, intellectuals trained through conventional means, have been drawn into the ANC and SACP. That one is trained as a priest or a lawyer or teacher does not mean that one is automatically equipped to contribute intellectually to the development of the political party or national liberation movement in the various terrains on which it operates. The processes of interaction between these intellectuals in the structures of the organisation is one way in which book knowledge drawn from formal institutions is transformed into political understanding, which in combination and debate with others becomes part of the intellectual input and output of the organisation. What is required varies from time to time. Thus Joe Slovo and Joe Matthews (who later left the ANC and SACP) were trained as lawyers and were theorists in the Communist Party, and became strategists of guerrilla warfare. In the period of negotiations, Slovo had again to convert his theoretical expertise into settlements and transition.

The process of acquiring a university qualification is in the main an individual process. A student sits in the library and at home, attends classes and writes examinations as an individual. If the person passes an examination that means he or she has a certificate or degree and conforms to the conventional characterisation of an intellectual. For a political party something more than this is required and it can only be acquired through collective work. Many of the qualities required for obtaining formal qualifications remain applicable –the need to read and study. But there is a much greater collective involvement and the idea is to make the insights derived, not part of the body of organic intellectuals alone, but the membership as a whole. Gramsci writes:

One should stress the importance and significance which, in the modern world, political parties have in the elaboration and diffusion of conceptions of the world, because essentially what they do is to work out the ethics and the politics corresponding to these conceptions and act as it were as their historical `laboratory'. The parties recruit individuals out of the working mass, and the selection is made on practical and theoretical criteria at the same time. The relation between theory and practice becomes even closer the more the conception is vitally and radically innovatory and opposed to old ways of thinking. For this reason one can say that the parties are the elaborators of a new integral and totalitarian¹⁸ intelligentsias and the crucibles where the unification of theory and practice, understood as a real historical process, takes place. It is clear from this that the parties should be formed by

¹⁸ Gramsci uses the word `totalitarian' not `in its modern sense, but as meaning simultaneously “unified” and “all-absorbing”. (Editor’s footnotes, 1971,335, note 20).

individual memberships and not on the pattern of the British Labour Party, because, if it is a question of providing an organic leadership for the entire economically active mass, this leadership should not follow old schemas but should innovate. But innovation cannot come from the mass, at least at the beginning, except through the mediation of an elite for whom the conception implicit in human activity has already become to a certain degree a coherent and systematic ever-present awareness and a precise and decisive will. (1971, 335)

Referring to the 'modern *Prince*' or communist party, Gramsci sees the organisation as

the proclaimer and organiser of an intellectual and moral reformation, which also means creating the terrain for a subsequent development of the national-popular collective will towards the realisation of a superior, total form of modern civilization.

These two basic points—the formation of a national-popular collective will, of which the modern Prince is at once and the same time the organiser and the active, operative expression; and intellectual and moral reformation should structure the entire work. (1971, 132-3)

In this passage one can see an emphasis especially relevant to a movement, which proclaimed its task as unifying a broad range of people behind a common programme in order to end apartheid. It accords with the early sentiments of Seme, prior to the founding of the ANC and later attempts of the ANC to depict itself as the embodiment of the nation in the making.

But the argument presented here is that a political party can perform the role of a 'collective intellectual' in another sense and that has special importance in the context of the South African liberation struggle. This is where a political party or national liberation movement periodically intervenes and—as a collective—performs an intellectual role. This may be through collectively generated policy documents or strategic interventions or radio broadcasts and other media. What is essentially intellectual about these interventions is that they give meaning to events, conditions, situations, that may appear to be fairly settled or alternatively, to have suddenly changed. The intervention generally also tends to provide direction as to what can be done or should be done in relation to this set of conditions. This is at once a conjunctural analysis and usually also a tactical and strategic intervention. (Cf for example, ANC, 1969).

The intervention may be directed at the organisation's membership and followers or the public at large. It is meant to be an interpretation as well as a guide. It is a consensus of the body of intellectuals within the party or of a party that has become a body of intellectuals. But that does not signify an unproblematic intervention starting from within the party itself. Every consensus represents a result of struggle, not a simple translation of what is already there. Consensus is not the same as absolute agreement and most products of consensus are themselves subject to further struggle.

ANC acting as 'collective intellectual'-Strategy and Tactics document of 1969

It has been argued that the ANC and its allies through interventions via documentation and other media, from time to time initiated or entered into debates, gave meaning to situations and through this acted as a 'collective intellectual'. One important illustration of this phenomenon was at the time of the Morogoro consultative conference in Tanzania, called at a time of crisis and demoralisation in 1969. The crisis related not only to events immediately preceding the conference but also to the entire situation following the banning of the ANC and its hasty organisation underground, initiation of armed struggle and the subsequent arrest of much of its top leadership.

The re-establishment of the organisation in exile was a slow process, partly because the ANC was at first over-optimistic in its expectations of a return to South Africa. It was only in 1967 that the ANC headquarters was acknowledged to be outside the country.

The immediate result of the Rivonia arrests and subsequent 'mopping up' trials of less senior operatives were to create an atmosphere of overwhelming power on the part of the apartheid state. Very faltering steps to re-establish a presence inside and outside the country on the part of the liberation movement did not initially have great impact. This perception of state invincibility was partly exaggerated but nevertheless corresponded to what many of the organisation's supporters believed to be the case. They did not see much hope of a way out of the apparent defeat of the liberation movement.

Outside, with many cadres receiving advanced military training, there was some impatience in just waiting. Military action was initiated through engaging Rhodesian forces, together with ZAPU¹⁹, with a view to fighting their way through to South Africa. This was in two campaigns in 1967 and 1968, where despite some impressive showings, the overall impact was limited or even negative.²⁰

In their retreat from the battlefield, many cadres sought refuge in Botswana but were arrested and sentenced to some years in prison. On their return to Dar –es –Salaam there was considerable anger and dissatisfaction and a document (known as the 'Chris Hani memorandum' was produced criticising the leadership for over-emphasising diplomacy at the expense of armed struggle. (Cf Shubin, 1999).²¹

At the same time, the ANC and other southern African liberation movements experienced a serious diplomatic reverse with the adoption of the Lusaka manifesto –decided by states of the region, over the heads of and without consulting the liberation movements themselves and calling for negotiations with the apartheid regime as a way of solving the conflict. (Karis and Gerhart, 1997).

The conference met in an atmosphere of considerable demoralisation and some division amongst the exiled community as well as some despondency within the country. The

¹⁹ The Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union, under the leadership of then imprisoned Joshua Nkomo, later to merge with ZANU (PF), under Robert Mugabe.

²⁰ Regarding successes, cf Karis and Gerhart, 1997, 27

²¹ Hani refers to the assassinated MK commander and leader of the SACP, who faced the possibility of being sentenced to death after submitting this memorandum. (Cf Shubin, 1999)

Strategy and Tactics document sought to address that situation. Many of its formulations may have been superseded by events or proven to be wrong. But it was nevertheless an intellectual intervention by an organisation, an intervention that served to empower people, to instil in them a sense that the enemy was not invincible and could in fact be defeated –albeit through a protracted struggle on many fronts.

The document sets the scene by answering the question whether it had embarked on armed struggle too late. There had been talk of ‘fighting back’ and taking up arms since the early 1950s, (Mandela, 1994, Elinor Sisulu, 2002, Delius, 1996, interview with John Nkadameng 2003, Mhlaba, 2001, Bonner et al, unpub 2003). Why then did the ANC delay its decision until 1961:

Is it that the character of the state had so altered fundamentally that only in 1961 did armed struggle become the only alternative? Not at all. There has never been a moment in the history of South Africa since 1652 in which the White ruling class would have given privileges without a physical battle.Is there substance in the accusations by some of our detractors that until the early sixties the liberation movement was lacking in military fervour and the desire for radical change? In other words was its policy not a revolutionary one?

..... The art of revolutionary leadership ...is surely a question of whether, in the given concrete situation, the course or policy advocated will aid or impede the prospects of the conquest of power. In this-the only test, the advocacy of armed struggle can, in some situations, be as counter-revolutionary as the advocacy of its opposite in other situations. Ultimately, ill planned or premature manifestations of violence impede and do not advance the prospect for revolutionary change and are clearly counter-revolutionary....(ANC, 1969)

The document proceeds to outline the then current approach to guerrilla warfare. What is important for our present purposes is how it then speaks into the question of the strength and weaknesses of ‘the enemy’. This is important because it had been some decades since the oppressed people of South Africa had faced colonial conquerors in warfare. Now it was facing a modern state, well equipped with a relatively advanced, industrial base. After outlining the strengths of the material base, repressive apparatus and armaments programme, the document continues:

If there is one lesson that the history of guerrilla struggle has taught it is that the material strength and resources of the enemy is by no means a decisive factor. Guerrilla warfare almost by definition presents a situation in which there is a vast imbalance of material and military resource between the opposing sides. It is designed to cope with the situation in which the enemy is infinitely superior in relation to every conventional factor of warfare. It is *par excellence* the weapon of the materially weak against the materially strong. Given its popular character and given a population which increasingly sides with and shields the guerrilla whilst at the same time opposing and exposing the enemy, the survival and growth of a people’ army is assured by the skilful exercise of tactics. Surprise, mobility and tactical retreat should make it difficult for the enemy to bring into play its superior fire-power in any decisive battles. No individual battle is fought in circumstances favourable to the enemy. Superior forces can thus be harassed, weakened and, in the end, destroyed. The absence of an orthodox front, of fighting lines; the need of the enemy to attenuate his resources and lines of communication over vast areas; the need to protect the widely scattered installations on which its economy is dependent; these are among the factors which serve in the long run to compensate in favour of the guerrilla for the disparity in the starting strength of the adversaries. The words ‘in the

long run' must be stressed because it would be idle to dispute the considerable military advantages to the enemy of his high level industrialisation, his ready-to hand reserves of white manpower and his excellent roads, railways and air transport which facilitate swift manoeuvres and speedy concentration of personnel. But we must not overlook the fact that over a period of time many of these unfavourable factors will begin to operate in favour of the liberation forces. (150-51)

What is important for the argument presented here is that this is an intellectual intervention, it gives meaning to a series of events, situations and a range of forces in a way that empowers the popular masses or, given what was known and believed at the time, it made sense. It may well be that many of these formulations were modified or had to be abandoned, but it remains an intervention of a liberation movement acting as a collective intellectual.

The intervention served as an antidote to those who saw no hope, who analysed the power relationship between oppressor and oppressed as one that could never be reversed. It was a basis for many people to have their commitment to struggle reinvigorated. Others joined the organisation on the basis of this analysis because it was seen as providing a meaningful and convincing appraisal of how the struggle might unfold and that joining the ranks might not be futile.

Over the years that followed there were many such interventions, though this may have been one of the more powerful. The later interventions had significance mainly because they spoke into changed situations and new possibilities. One of the most famous interventions was when the ANC leadership called on the people of South Africa to make apartheid 'unworkable' and South Africa 'ungovernable'. Much of this reached activists through the ANC's illegally broadcast Radio Freedom, on the air every evening at 7 p.m. For a while there was ungovernability and one of the reasons why a negotiated settlement became possible was because, while the forces of resistance could not defeat the apartheid regime, apartheid governability was not possible or sustainable.

The importance of these interventions, which can all be characterised as intellectual interventions, was that they sensed the mood of the masses, the disarray in the ranks of the regime and offered arguments and slogans that could be realised. In some cases, like the call for establishment of embryonic organs of 'People's Power', the action on the ground took shape in a way that could not be envisaged in Lusaka. Nevertheless, the ANC provided the overall strategic direction within which these cadres acted.

This was done with especial potency in the annual January 8 statement of the ANC, delivered by its president on the day of the organisation's anniversary, providing a conjunctural analysis as well as 'tasks' for various sectors.

The Communist Party throughout this period was also producing literature of various kinds, underground publications, illegal journals and various statements. Some of these made a direct impact on the ANC, as can be seen by the latter's adoption of the 'Colonialism of a Special Type' thesis as a way of explaining the South African social formation.

Consensus and contestation in producing an intellectual product

The intellectual products of the liberation movement were a result of debate and contestation. There was debate at all levels, sometimes starting in Maputo, passing on to Angola, then to Lusaka and so on (Interview Pallo Jordan, 2003). But having debate is obviously not the same as debate that feeds into a decision. The degree to which the membership has been involved has varied, depending on the conditions of the time. In the exile period, where there was a considerable security threat, the tendency was for decisions to be made at the top and communicated downwards. But in crisis situations, dissatisfaction or 'rumblings' amongst the membership resulted on occasions in general meetings and consultative conferences having *de facto* powers to make decisions. This was the case in 1969 and again in 1985 after a mutiny had been suppressed.

That decisions may have been made at the top did not mean the consensus that was formed was unproblematically achieved or that it represented a decision or statement or viewpoint that was open to only one interpretation. The ANC speaks of itself as a broad church embracing various tendencies and it has for some time had within its ranks people with a variety of political tendencies. In ANC matters, it is also not uncommon for some who are supposed to come from the same tendency, especially Communists, to disagree with one another when 'wearing their ANC hat'.

There were divergences over how to conduct the struggle throughout the ANC's history and in the exile period over the type of military campaign to wage, how it should be combined with political struggle, and what the organisational implications should be.

New conjuncture after 1990 and again after 1994

The character of organisational inputs into debates, the documentation that was produced was generally a result of a consensus that emerged within the ANC itself and in consultation with its 'revolutionary alliance' partners, SACP and SACTU (later replaced by COSATU). In the period prior to 1990 there was not significant divergence in the perspectives of the three partners.

The unbanning of the ANC and SACP created conditions, which placed strain on the relationships within and between the organisations. In the first place the ANC had to re-establish itself inside the country combining elements from a variety of different traditions. (Suttner, 2003). And the conditions under which negotiations were conducted caused tensions, especially amongst the military who were not all convinced of the need to suspend armed action, and also amongst the mass democratic movement who resisted attempts at demobilisation or curbing mass-based activity.

The election of the ANC as leading force in government again created new relationships. The distinction between government and organisation became blurred. GEAR, (the acronym referring to the government's conservative macro-economic policy, adopted in 1996), was announced by government, but declared to be ANC policy before going through any process within the organisation or the alliance. The ANC as organisation

appeared to be less of a factor than the ANC in government and the membership appeared to have a very limited role between elections.

In the case of the alliance, increasingly the post 1994 period has seen the development of tensions over the relationship between its components. One of the reasons may be a blurring between the notion of ANC as government and ANC as organisation. It is not clear whether the SACP and COSATU are relating, in the alliance, to government or to an equal partner, as fellow organisations. If it is a relationship to government, as it increasingly appears to be, the SACP and COSATU may be cast more in the role of *petitioners* rather than equal partners.

The period has also seen volatility deriving from electoral politics. Who are enemies and who are allies has reflected a degree of fluidity that was unimaginable some years back. The ANC formed an alliance with the Inkatha Freedom Party, responsible for many deaths of ANC/UDF supporters –but motivated by a much-needed desire for peace in the province. The organisation later also formed an alliance with the NNP, the former ruling party of the apartheid regime, (enabling it to share power in the Western Cape Province). This was depicted as part of a nation building process.

At the same time tensions between its alliance partners –the SACP and COSATU descended into public attacks. Documents were issued calling the SACP and COSATU ultra left and attacking their left credentials (Cf e.g. Moleketi and Jele, 2002). A minister (who was then in the SACP leadership) commended Lenin’s Left Wing Communism-an infantile disorder, to COSATU.

But the trend is for yesterday’s allies to sometimes become opponents or be cast that way and yesterday’s enemies becoming allies. Significantly the discourse used by the ANC remains primarily Marxist or Brezhnevite Marxism²² in its attacks on its allies. Paradoxically it is the classic texts of Marx and Lenin that are deployed to defend the government’s macro-economic policies. The differences within the tripartite alliance are not irreparable, but they do indicate that there is no longer a sense of equality and the conditions of the relationship have been fundamentally altered.

What this also means is that the notion of a collective intellectual function may be restricted to the utterances of the ANC/government and insofar as SACP and Cosatu perform such functions it may tend to be more independently of the ANC, than in the past.

The theoretical basis for this collapse of the alliance as collective intellectual is interesting. The ANC depicts itself as a broad church, meaning that it is open to people from a variety of political tendencies –Christians, Communists, African nationalists, capitalists and so on. But the notion of a broad church or any church also implies priesthood, often with superior powers of scriptural interpretation.²³ That notion may

²² Many current ANC leaders, who have left the SACP, passed through the Lenin School during the Brezhnev period.

²³ I am indebted to David Masondo for raising this at a seminar I presented in 2002

symbolically be represented by the President or whoever is a leading theoretician, though that function may be dormant in certain phases and more prominent in others

What has tended to happen in the post 1994 period however, is that statements of the leadership have often been presented as fait accompli or interpretations of leadership have not met with much challenge. This is partly because rightly or wrongly, powers of leadership are now associated with powers to make appointments that may carry prestige or high remuneration.

Consequently the authoritative statements of certain leadership figures may limit debate within the 'broad church'. The President himself, Thabo Mbeki is a leading intellectual, whose speeches have now been published in two books and appear regularly on the ANC website along with a weekly letter that he writes. (Mbeki, 1998, 2002). At the same time, these interventions do not appear to be part of a broad debate. They are more in the nature of 'authoritative pronouncements', carrying the weight of leadership.

Conclusion

There are many issues that preoccupy intellectuals on this continent that are important, but are not part of this enquiry. The paper does not seek to say anything about such issues as 'speaking truth to power', the relationship that individual intellectuals should have to a liberation movement or political party, how they should exercise an independent role and so on. These are different types of questions from those that have been examined.

The object of this paper has been to describe a relatively neglected process of intellectual formation and output, within the framework of a Gramscian paradigm. The value of Gramsci is that he redefines notions of education and intellectuals in a way that enable us to recognise such processes in experiences that normally do not 'qualify'.

Much of the data presented demonstrates these intellectual and educational processes occurring, though it happens in an uneven way. The Robben Island Prison experience was obviously much more structured as a process of intellectual creation and intellectual production than the period that preceded it and many others that followed, though all are examples of such processes. The prison experience is unique for it is inherently more structured and concentrated than any processes can be in 'normal life'. This meant that some educational objectives could be achieved there, possibly much more easily than outside.

There is much more to be added and developed, and it is hoped that the discussion will help take this contribution further.

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